The Divine Marriage
God's Purpose & Design for Human Sexuality

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[The Transformation Series]

Divine Order in Creation and Covenant

Imagine the scene in heaven as the Trinity plans the Creation. They've got a working model spread out before them, with little planets and trees and human action figures. Pondering anew what He can do, the Father points to a human action figure and says to the Son, "I think we ought to make them male and female." "What's that?" asks the Son. "Well, I'm going to divide Adam into two parts, male and female, you know, to make things more interesting." A bit bemused and surprised, God the Son then turns to the Holy Spirit for His response, who pauses, throws open His hands and says, "Why not? What the heck. Knock yourself out Abba!" Do you think it might have happened something like that? By the way modern culture treats gender differences (if they acknowledge them at all) you'd think it might have gone something like that.

In Genesis we read . . . .

And the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone.
I will make a helper suitable for him." . . . So the Lord God caused the man
to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping,
He took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.
Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib (side) he had taken
out of the man, and he brought her to the man.
(Genesis 2:18, 21-22)

Why did God do it that way? Why create one being and then take a part of that being and create a second, differentiated yet complimentary

being who is “bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh,” a being who is sexually, emotionally and in other ways different, yet of his own substance? Upon seeing her, Adam could have observed, “It’s me . . . but not me.” If you think about it, it does sound like the kind of thing you might expect a Trinity to do.

The Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) is a family, and thus man in God’s image must be made a family as well. Therefore, a man cannot completely realize the essence of his existence until he learns to exist with someone and for someone. Both relationship and communion are crucial to this process.

And so we see from Genesis 1 & 2 that God created woman from the side of man so that the man would not be alone. From the teaching of the New Testament, saints have since discovered that He also created the Church from the side of the second Adam - Christ - for the same reason - for intimate fellowship.

Back in the Genesis account, we note that the newly created Eve, was Adam - his very flesh and bone, and for that reason, the Bible says, Adam called her woman, and, for that reason a man is to leave mother and father and be united to his wife to become one flesh (v24). For what reason is man to marry a wife? Because woman was originally a constituent part of man, she must return to become one with him again, so that the full expression and design of God’s image in human beings can be revealed.

Here we have another parallel between the Old Testament type and the New Testament fulfillment. Eve was to reunite with her source and become one with him - just as we are with Christ, as He prayed in John 17. Sexuality, therefore, is a prefigurement of the intimate relationship that God desires to have with man. In fact, the marital union and covenant, in all its dimensions, is meant to gloriously reveal the very image of God in ways that we can only begin to understand.

Ah, but there’s more to this mystery than can be seen on the surface. The union of a man and a woman in Holy Matrimony is not literally the permanent recombining of two bodies into one. This is mystery that reaches depths of meaning beyond what our present intellectual capacity can grasp. Clearly however, what woman is as a part of man is not tied to individuated pieces of flesh and bone, but is far broader and more profound

than that. She is the necessary compliment to him that together reveals the glory of the image of God in humanity. Her parts and his parts each have their own order and function. Together and rightly ordered, their united differences ignite the power and glory of creation itself, which is the consummate activity of God from the beginning.

So God does a two-stage creation of man. First he makes the full-orbed being (Adam, which in the Hebrew means, mankind). Then in phase two, God removes woman from Adam's side and makes Eve a separate being, though of Adam's substance, designed to ultimately reunite to her source through the mystery of Holy Matrimony. And the spark, the power of that union is meant to gloriously reveal the very image of God to angels and archangels and all the company of heaven and earth. That is why Satan fights tooth and nail to pervert and distort rightly ordered human sexuality, holy matrimony, the family and fatherhood in particular.

In fact, the amount of time and effort that Satan expends to destroy the image of God reflected in marriage, fatherhood and human sexuality is a barometer of just how incredibly important it is to God's plan and the expression of His glory.

Beloved, there is a profound and awesome reason for the way God ordered the creation of man - one that is commented on throughout Scripture, and one that we must observe if we are to find the fulfillment of our very being as humans. It is ordered as the union of a man and a woman in marriage - heterosexual and monogamous - an order that Jesus unambiguously reaffirmed in Matthew.

Covenant: The Heart of This Mystery

Part of the understanding of the "Why?" of this mystery can be found in the understanding of covenant, which is the vehicle by which a man and a woman are to establish the lifelong, faithful relationship in which physical sexual interaction is meant to operate.

Covenant is also the fundamental tool that God has designed to construct and order His relationship with man.

Dr. Scott Hahn (whose research I will be sharing with you in this booklet) notes that a covenant is an exchange of persons, as opposed to a contract, which is an exchange of promises.

Covenants are established by making an oath - an oath that creates kinship between the two who are making the covenant.

Christ strikes a covenant with us at our baptism - one that is stronger than blood, one that establishes a divine, everlasting kinship bond. In making covenant with Him, God adopts us into His family and treats us as heirs to the family fortune.

The Hebrew word for “oath” is “shevah,” meaning “to seven oneself” (In Genesis 21:27-31, Abraham makes a treaty with Abimelech using seven ewe lambs, and they called the place “Beersheva,” which means, “the place of the oath” or “the well of the sevens.”)

If you don’t have an oath, you don’t have a covenant.

Another Hebrew word for oath is “I raise my hand” (See Dt 32:40ff). When we raise our hands in worship, for example, we are swearing an oath. We lift up God’s name when we invoke God’s name in an oath.

Making an oath is to call upon the power of God to bind Satan and evil. It is a mystery of drawing down the presence of God, of engaging God for help and power so that we can do whatever it is we are pledging to do.

Hahn quotes Old Testament Professor Barker, who noted:

The cosmic order is restored by means of the oath and the name of the Son of Man. The oath is the means of creating order. It is the means of binding the fallen spirits who operate through nature in order to make them serve a higher purpose. To be initiated into the oath, according to the Jewish outlook, gives great power. It enables the initiate to summon and bind the spirits in his service by means of the even greater name whose authority he uses. When the great oath was broken [referring to Adam's sin and the Fall] the system began to collapse. The name of the Son of Man is the most powerful means of restoring order to a broken world.

Scott Hahn concludes Professor Barker's thought by saying: "Whenever you invoke the name of Jesus, you tap the power of God's oath." That is why God gave saints the power to bind evil and release or loose righteousness in this world.

Another Hebrew term is "to put oneself under a curse" in order to receive God's blessing. We are therefore placing ourselves under a curse, to be damned if we don't keep our part of the oath.

Only in Christianity does God bind Himself to man by swearing an oath. God put Himself under a curse if He didn't keep the terms of the covenant to Abraham and his seed. Since we did not keep our part of the covenant, God became man and became a curse for us in order to make us His covenant family.

Hahn concludes:

We are sitting on a stockpile of spiritual power that we have barely begun to tap. Do not be stingy with your blessings. Do not withhold from your [loved ones] the invocation of God's name. Whenever you give the benediction; every time you make the sign of the Cross; every time you invoke the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; every time you do anything in the name of God, you are tapping the power of creation and the great oaths that God swore when He fashioned the world; but even more, you are tapping the greater power of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, who has brought about a new creation, having sworn a new covenant oath, having taken upon Himself the curse for our sin.

Let's bring the concept of swearing an oath into our New Testament understanding. Guess what the Greek word for oath is? The Greek word for "oath" is "mysterion" - mystery - a concept which is found throughout the New Testament - a concept used in Ephesians 5:32 that describes the marital relationship between a man and woman as a type of the marriage between Christ and the Church.

When we ask for God's blessing and submit ourselves to His curse by oath, God comes down and empowers us to do what we would otherwise not be capable of doing.

Another Greek word for “oath” is “horkia” or “horkos” - the English term “exorcism,” or “to oath out”. When you exorcise demonic spirits in ministry to someone, you literally “oath out” evil.

Dr. Hahn notes that “Cross my heart and hope to die” is a medieval oath formula.

The martyrs in heaven before the throne with raised hands are bearing witness under oath to Christ’s faithfulness. As a result, the accuser of the brethren is cast out.

When we assemble at the Lord’s Table or Eucharist, we are engaging in spiritual warfare. The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin word for “oath” - “sacramentum”. And so, the sacraments of the church are oaths set in symbolic form, which Christ has left us to conquer powers that exceed our meager strength. Our faith, our testimony, binds evil and conquers Satan.

It is a real war on a real battlefield, a real trial in a real courtroom. It’s also a clan struggle, a family united against forces that are determined to deface and destroy all that is good and pure and holy.

In having made our eternal covenant with God through Christ, we have united ourselves with Him and become one flesh. And because His name is now attached to our lives, to our ministries, to our words, He can use us to bind evil. We are now extensions of His very body through which He can continue to physically touch the world with His healing power.

Just as your offspring will carry on your name and legacy, so we carry on His name and legacy.

The power of Almighty God is not being released in many of our lives because we have never embraced this high calling. We have married Christ in word but have never consummated the marriage by giving ourselves to Him with the trust and abandon that we were designed to give. Rather than giving our all to Him, rather than submitting to the source of our life with joyful obedience, we have grumbled and complained and questioned Him at every turn in the road. We have rejected the call to love, which is a call to sacrificially give ourselves to Him just as He has sacrificially given Himself to us. We have defiled the marriage bed with other gods, with other idols. We have remained fixed on ourselves, offering

only periodic, emotion-laden gestures of love that only tease but never deliver.

The Lord might well think some of the same thoughts as Romeo as he waited outside Juliet's bedroom balcony for the slightest glimmer of hope that she shared in his love for her. God may see us at a worship service, erupting with a sudden burst of romantic sentiment as we sing our love songs to Him.

"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks," He might exclaim. "It is my lady. Oh, it is my love. Oh, that she knew she were."

But so often, His hope is dashed as we leave the service and return to our self-involved lives without putting any of those sentiments into practice - without any change in our lives, without any deepening of our pursuit of Him, without any reality beyond the sentimental notions of those love songs that we mouthed.

Christ has made promises and sworn and faithfully executed oaths to bind Himself to us and to bind evil and cast it off, if we will simply be true to Him in ways that are real.

God as Husband to His People in the Old Testament

Let's look more closely at the idea of Christ as our Bridegroom - once again using the research of Dr. Scott Hahn.

In Scripture, you have four successive ideas lain upon each other:

1. God is the Husband and the Bridegroom of the corporate nation of Israel.

2. He is the Husband and Bridegroom of an expanded expression of Israel, the Church, which in Galatians 6:16 Paul refers to as the Israel of God. (Paul had also told us in Romans 9:4 that "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel").

3. God is the Husband and Bridegroom of every individual member of that corporate body.

4. He is the Husband and Bridegroom, in a unique way, of everyone who, like Paul, have been called to remain celibate for the sake of the Kingdom of God. When talking about the blessing bestowed on "eunuchs for the kingdom," God says in Isaiah 56:5: “I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.”

Let’s take a tour through Isaiah to see the development of this thought in the Old Testament……

When the nation of Israel (God’s bride) decided to play the harlot, God let her go to her lovers. Dr. Scott Hahn observes: “The nature of God’s justice and wrath is that He gives us what we want; He gives us what we choose; until we wake up and realize that we really desire what He calls us to choose.”

Isaiah 54:5 provides one of the clearer descriptions of the mystical marriage between God and man, when He decides to bring the nation of Israel back into grace:

For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is His name - the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth.

Then in Isaiah 61:10a,c:

I delight greatly in the Lord . . . . For He has clothed me . . .
as a bridegroom decks himself (lit.) as a priest . . .

And in Isaiah 62:5:

As a young man marries a maiden (virgin),
so will your sons marry you;
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so will your God rejoice over you.

In Ezekiel 23, the divided nations of Israel and Judah, the daughters of God, are likened unto sister harlots, engaging in harlotry first with Egypt,

then with Assyria and one even with Babylon. God gives them over to their lovers and their lovers inflict the punishment due their sins.

In Ezekiel 24 God causes Ezekiel's wife, (whom God describes as "the delight of your eyes"), to die, and He tells Ezekiel not to mourn her death as a sign to the Israelites, who are about to be conquered by Babylon and lose both the temple and Jerusalem (which should have been "the delight of their eyes"), and who will likewise fail to mourn their loss, but will instead waste away because of their sins (Ezekiel 24:23).

In Hosea 2, Hosea is told to marry a harlot, so that he will know how it feels for God to have to watch His bride, His people, go whoring. God then promises to bring His bride back into grace. In Hosea 2:16, it says:

> *"In that day," declares the Lord, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.*

Then in vv 19-20:

> *I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.*
> (see also 2 Kings 17)

And so, using His relationship with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, God eventually begins to hint at an impending marital relationship between God and man that is greater than the one experienced up to that point. The plot thickens as we move into the New Testament . . . .

Christ as Bridegroom to His People in the New Testament

In John 1, the words "In the beginning" and "The Word" and "Life" and "Light" and "Darkness" deliberately invoke our memory of Genesis 1, because our Creator is about to become our Redeemer. And so, John

deliberately uses the imagery of God's action in Creation to introduce the imagery of His action in Redemption and marital union with redeemed man. Hahn states: “The Old Covenant fashioned in the beginning is about to be renewed in a powerful new way.” v 14 - "The word became flesh and 'dwelt' among us" (from the Greek for “tabernacled” among us).

In John 1:29,35,43; 2:1, we see reference to a succession of days, with each verse starting with the words, "the next day," "the next day," "the next day," and finally, "on the third day" (which counting from the first reference, is the seventh day). This is a clear reference to the seven days of Creation in Genesis. The marriage in Cana, therefore, was on the seventh day, where Jesus, the Lamb of God, comes to a marriage feast. Continuing to follow the Genesis motif, Jesus comes on the seventh day to usher in the new Creation at a marriage feast. Jesus, the new Adam, and Mary, the new Eve, are the only ones identified at the marriage feast in Cana. There, Jesus calls his mother “woman,” which rather than being a rude way of talking to her is instead a reference back to the “woman” or Eve in Genesis.

Jesus uses six stone jars of water that were used for ceremonial washing (Take note that in Numbers 19:11-12, ceremonial washing for uncleanness had to be done with water and had to take place on the third and seventh day).

Notice also in the miracle at Cana account in John 2, that Jesus associated providing wine with "His hour" (In John 2:4 - When Mary seemed to be asking him to provide wine for the guests, He replied, “My hour has not yet come”). When was Jesus' "hour"? In John’s gospel, Jesus’ "hour" is the moment of His death on the Cross. Here, Mary's request generates a symbolic down payment on that. He transforms water meant for the Jewish rites of purification. (It is very interesting to note that the term used in the Septuagint of that water in Numbers 19 is literally “baptizmois”).

Scott Hahn says:

The baptismal water of the Old Covenant ritual of purification is what Jesus decides to use to provide the best wine at the wedding feast. All of this prefigures what He expected to deliver when His “hour” came.

John is trying to get us to see that there is a mystical marriage getting ready to take place that we should be able to see spiritually through this ordinary and mundane marriage [at Cana].

He continues the idea in John 3, where John the Baptist talks about Jesus as the Bridegroom (v 29).

The best wine, the wine of the New Covenant, has been saved until last, given to us in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In John 2, we have the marriage supper at Cana. In John 3, we have Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus about baptism - being born of water and Spirit. This is followed by John the Baptist talking about Jesus as the Bridegroom - making an apparent association between baptism and marriage.

Next, in Ephesians 5:26, Paul refers to Christ cleansing the church by the washing with water (referring to baptism) through the word. Baptism, therefore, not only brings about the new birth, it also brings about the marriage with Christ.

In Ephesians 5:32, Paul says that he is referring to a profound mystery, which is Christ and the Church. Mysterion - oath - magnum sacramentum (Latin). The one true and everlasting marriage covenant is the one between Christ and the Church. A priest [in his office] represents Christ the Bridegroom before His Bride. (See also Romans 6 & 7 for a correlation between baptism and marriage.)

In John 4, after Jesus has been described as the Bridegroom, He meets the Samaritan woman at the well (where in the Old Testament, marriage encounters occurred - where Jacob's and Isaac's wives were found - a place of betrothal). He tells her that she has had five husbands and the one she is with is not her own. Dr. Hahn believes that this represents the going after other gods or husbands that Israel had done. And in saying, "the one you're with now is not your own" Hahn says that the force of the Greek indicates that Jesus is referring to Himself. Hosea was the last prophet to speak to Samaria, and had said, (in 2 Kings 17), because of her idolatries, she was going to get five different Baals or false

husbands. Thus the one she was with, Jesus, was not her own husband, because she was a Samaritan and thus cut off from Israel.

Our sexuality is a type and shadow of something far greater and more glorious. It images the sacrificial love of God in Christ, giving Himself to us (through the instrumentality of bread and wine) in a representation of that one sacrifice on the Cross.

Hahn notes:

Therefore, sex is not good; Campbell's Soup is good - Uumm good. Sex is not great. Kelloggs Frosted Flakes are great. Sex is holy. Sex is sacred. Our sexuality has been made by God to surpass what is merely good, or great. Nothing in the natural order is so holy. When the two become one, they become three in one. Sex is holy. Therefore it must only be expressed in covenant. It is a sacramental sign that points to a supernatural reality that far surpasses anything in the marital covenant in earth.

Fulfillment sexually does not occur merely when expressed in genital intercourse - it occurs when you become a husband and a father (or wife and mother). That is the real meaning of sex, masculinity or maleness, just as becoming a wife or a mother is the meaning and fulfillment of femaleness.

Summary of the Biblical Evidence

• In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel (God's bride) played the harlot, and God let her go to her lovers, yet He never forsook the idea that there was always going to be a people who would be His faithful bride.

• God said in Isaiah: "Your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is His name." - also: "As a young man marries a maiden (virgin), so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

• In Hosea, God promised to bring His harlot bride back, saying: “In that day, you will call me ‘my husband’ . . . I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.”

• Thus, using His relationship with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, God eventually begins to hint at an impending marital relationship between God and man that is greater than the one experienced up to that point.

• In the New Testament, in the book of John, we see a repeating of creation words and themes found in Genesis 1, in the unveiling of the New Creation that Christ has brought (words like: light, life, the Word, in the beginning, etc.). In fact, we see seven days of a new creation counted out in the first two chapters of John.

• John deliberately uses the imagery of God's action in Creation to introduce the imagery of His action in redemption and marital union with redeemed man.

• The marriage in Cana falls on the seventh day in this new creation metaphor, where Jesus, the Lamb of God, comes to a marriage feast to usher in the new Creation.

• He is the new Adam, who like the first Adam, calls the new Eve, "woman" (Mary being the new Eve).

• In Cana, Jesus uses the baptismal water of the Old Covenant ritual of purification (the water in the six stone jars) to provide the best wine for the wedding feast. When the master of the banquet comments to the bridegroom that he has saved the best wine for last, he speaks prophetically of the wine of Christ's own blood that was to be served at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

• In John 3:29, John the Baptist speaks of Jesus as the Bridegroom.

• We saw in Ephesians 5:26 how Paul refers to Christ cleansing the church by the washing with water through the word (referring to baptism). Baptism by the Holy Spirit, therefore, not only brings about the new birth, it also brings about the marriage with Christ (or at least the betrothal).

• In Ephesians 5:32, Paul, in talking about marriage relationships, says that he is referring to a profound mystery, (Mysterion - oath - magnum sacramentum in the Latin), which is Christ and the Church. The one true and everlasting marriage covenant is the one between Christ and the Church.

• After being described as the Bridegroom in John 3, in John 4 Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well (which in the Old Testament, was a place of betrothal - where Jacob's and Isaac's wives were found).

• So the themes of marriage between God and man repeatedly run throughout both Old and New Testaments.

• As we saw in Genesis 1 & 2, our sexuality is an integral part of this grand pageant. It is a type and shadow of something far greater and more glorious than itself. It images the sacrificial love of God in Christ, fathering new life by giving Himself to us in sacrificial love on the Cross.

Prophetic Parallels Between a First Century Jewish Wedding and the Forthcoming Marriage Between Believers and Christ

The parallels between a Jewish wedding and the wedding of Christ with believers goes a long way to explain why Satan has targeted marriage so intensely.

The Betrothal

First Century Jewish Wedding: The bridegroom and bride verbally pledge themselves in a lifelong covenant of marriage (Matthew 19:4-6).

Divine Marriage with Believers: God pledges Himself in an eternal covenant of marriage when we accept Him as Lord and Savior (Matthew 26:28-29; 1 Corinthians 11:25-26; Luke 22:20; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 7:22).

The Bride Price

First Century Jewish Wedding: The father of the bridegroom receives a payment (dowry) from the father of the bride as a promise and sealing of the impending marriage.

Divine Marriage with Believers: God the Father receives a payment - an agreed upon, (within the Trinity), sacrifice of His Son - so that His Son's soon-to-be bride (The Church) will be freed from the sins that would otherwise prevent the marriage from taking place (John 3:16; Ephesians 5:2b; Hebrews 9:26b-28; 10:10-14; 1 John 4:10).

Temporary Separation of Bride & Bridegroom

First Century Jewish Wedding: The bridegroom returns to His Father's house to prepare a place for his bride - a place that is a part of his father's house.

Divine Marriage with Believers: After the resurrection, Jesus returns to His Father's house (heaven) to prepare a place for His bride - the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (John 14:2-3; Revelation 21:1-3).

The Time of Preparation

First Century Jewish Wedding: Once the bridegroom finishes preparing the house for his bride, he tells his father and awaits permission to go get his bride.

Divine Marriage with Believers: When finished preparing a place for His bride in heaven, Jesus alerts His Father and awaits release from the Father to go get His bride.

The Timing of the Wedding

First Century Jewish Wedding: The bridegroom does not know when his father will give the signal to go retrieve his bride. Consequently, he always has to be ready.

Divine Marriage with Believers: Likewise, the Son does not know the day or the hour when His Father will give Him permission to retrieve His bride (Matthew 24:36,42-44; 25:13; Acts 1:7). He will come when the Bride has made herself ready (Revelation 19:6-8).

Note: Believers can know the "season" of His return (Matthew 24:33-44; 1 Thessalonians 5:4). In fact, Jesus chided the Pharisees for not discerning the time of His first coming (Luke 12:54-56; Revelation 1:1).

Clues to the Timing

First Century Jewish Wedding: Permission from the father of the bridegroom comes, by tradition, at night.

Divine Marriage with Believers: The return of Jesus for His bride will come "as a thief in the night" - probably referring to the increasing darkness of this world (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3; Matthew 24:37-41). "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the Bridegroom! Come out to meet Him.'"

Note: The parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) is appropriate here. The Bridegroom had taken a long time to return. Five of the virgin bridesmaids were ready but the other five had neglected to keep their oil lamps filled and were shut out of the wedding. (See also Isaiah 26:19-20)

The Return of the Bridegroom for the Bride

First Century Jewish Wedding: A trumpet blasts, with more to follow - signaling that the bridegroom is on His way. The wedding party joins the march to the bride's house.

Divine Marriage with Believers: A shout is heard: "Here is the Bridgroom! Come out to meet Him!" Trumpets are blown (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). A "cloud of witnesses" accompanies the procession (Hebrews 12:1; Revelation 21:1-3).

The Journey to the Bridegroom's New House

First Century Jewish Wedding: The bride is carried aloft to the Father's house on a litter, there to always live with the bridegroom (Romans 7:2).

Divine Marriage with Believers: The bride of Christ is carried aloft (the catching away or rapture of the Church), there to always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

The Wedding Feast

First Century Jewish Wedding: A seven-day wedding feast begins, with much food and wine provided by the bridegroom.

Divine Marriage with Believers: A seven-year wedding supper of the lamb takes place in heaven (during the Tribulation on earth). As Jesus

promised, the last cup is drunk at the wedding supper in heaven (John 2:9-10). It was the cup that Jesus refused to drink while on the cross, promising that it would be drunk with His followers in heaven (Matthew 26:28-29,39,42; 27:34; John 22:17). Indeed, the best wine was saved for last.

The Divine Masterpiece

I want to now put the final touches on describing this divine masterpiece.

We, as born again believers, need to live our lives in the knowledge of the fact that God has married us, both corporately, as the Body of Christ, and individually, as sons and daughters who He loves with such intensity that He was willing to let evil men torture Him on a Cross in order to win our hearts.

We need to live our lives in the knowledge that, in fact, the end for which we have been created is just such an intimate union with God - that our marriage with God is designed to kick in with all cylinders when we give our lives in covenant commitment to Him at the point of our new birth - and that what God hath joined to Himself, no man can put asunder. This is one of the great mysteries of God. It is for this that we were born and that Christ died and rose again.

The final text for our study is the primary one from which such a claim is derived - Ephesians 5:21-32.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with

water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become
one flesh."

<u>This is a profound mystery</u> —
<u>but I am talking about Christ and the Church</u>.

Three additional observations can be made in regard to our text:

1. It is a logical conclusion that what is true of the whole (Christ the Bridegroom marrying His Bride, the Church) can legitimately be seen as true for the parts of that whole (that each individual member of the Bride can be seen as marrying the Bridegroom).

2. In the Ephesians 5 passage, Paul uses Genesis 2:24 as his proof text, which uses the idiom "two becoming one flesh" for which The MacArthur Study Bible footnote reads: "One flesh speaks of a complete unity of parts making a whole."

3. It is common to find multiple levels of meaning in biblical texts, especially metaphorical ones.

There has been a tradition throughout the Christian era, especially in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, of seeing an individual "mystical marriage" as part of the greater corporate marriage between God and man. I am not suggesting, as pagan religions have done, that we are to unite sexually with God. God is a spirit and the realms of heaven transcend earthly sexual need or behavior. What I am suggesting is that the metaphor

of Christ marrying the Church can be taken individually by believers as well as the more common understanding of it being a corporate union.

This explains why in heaven we are no longer married or given in marriage. The final and eternal wedding has occurred and there is only one Bridegroom - Christ Himself.

My contention is that what is true of the whole body of Christ (we are His bride) is also true of the individuals that make up that body - that we can individually experience a oneness with Him that is only dimly prefigured in human sexuality and which transcends it.

Dr. Scott Hahn writes in his book *The Lamb's Supper*:

The earliest Christians taught that the sacred text operates on four levels, and all of those levels, all at once, teach God's one truth - like a symphony.

And in his book, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, Hahn writes:

When the two become one in marriage, the bridegroom gives the bride his flesh and blood; the bride receives him, his flesh and blood. (The Greek word haima, usually translated "blood," can refer to other bodily fluids, including the man's "seed." See John 1:13.) When he gives and she receives, they bring new life into the world. When does Christ, the Bridegroom, unite himself with his Bride? When does he give his flesh and blood in order to bring new life? In the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the consummation of the marriage between Christ and his Church. In the Eucharist he renews the New Covenant, which is his marriage covenant with her. It is much more than a banquet. It is a wedding feast. We the Bride receive our Bridegroom's Body in the Eucharist.

The marital imagery of Christ's love for his Church becomes a powerful symbol for the sacrament of marriage. Or is marriage a powerful symbol of Christ's love for his Church - for each of us?

We may need to execute a sort of Copernican revolution in our understanding of love. Just as God's Fatherhood is the perfect reality that human fatherhood portrayed, though imperfectly, so the marriage of Christ and the Church is the perfect reality portrayed by human marriage. Our vision for marital love and sexual intimacy should reflect this reality.

This challenges believers, especially married ones, to make marriage and family life a sign of Christ's intimate union with his bride. This makes sex more than 'four bare legs in a bed,' as CS Lewis said. Every marital act becomes a sign and a renewal of the New Covenant, a reaffirmation of the intense love Jesus has for each of us. . .
. . . God has placed in us these natural [sexual] desires, which reflect supernatural desires fulfilled only in him. . . .
. . . We desire intimacy, sexual union. We find it in other persons. But that desire points to a deeper desire, which only union with God can meet; and union with God proves to be deep intimacy, unimaginable ecstasy, infinite fulfillment of the desire to love and be loved, to give and receive totally, to become one with the other.

This is a truth that only the mystic can really understand; but then, mystics are lovers. And God wants us all to be lovers.

(from Dr. Scott Hahn, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, 1998, pp. 255-256)

In Ephesians 5:32, in speaking of a man and woman becoming one flesh, Paul says:

This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the Church.

In this verse, Paul delivers the coup de grâce, the final brilliant stroke and focal point of the epistle, whose thematic roots go all the way back to the first chapter. Like a swordsman making a final flourish before dispatching his foe, Paul shockingly and brilliantly rips the veil that had hidden the answer to the mystery of the supreme purpose and end for God

having saved us, as well as the mysteries behind God having made us male and female, sexual beings, called into faithful, monogamous, heterosexual relationships that were to personify the virtue of sacrificial love. This is the overarching theme and teaching of the Book of Ephesians - the great and high calling of the believer, the primary reason for creating and redeeming mankind.

He wants to marry us!

He wants us to be His lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward and forever more. And in the Upper Room, with a towel wrapped around Him and a basin of water in front of Him, God incarnate knelt down to propose marriage. And what God hath brought together, let no one put asunder!

Throughout the ages, many Christian leaders have understood from Genesis and Ephesians that there is both a corporate and individual "mystical marriage" between Christ and believers. In fact, many believers have claimed to have had a direct experience of just such a reality through dreams and visions.

There are other passages of Scripture that allude (albeit obliquely) to the idea that God's intimate union with His Church is at once both corporate and individual:

> Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.
> (1 Corinthians 12:27, NASB)

> . . . Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us . . . I in them and You in Me.
> (John 17:21b, 23)

This passage speaks of a profound intimacy that goes beyond what the natural mind can immediately grasp. It speaks to the issue of a level of intimacy between God and man that we are only beginning to understand.

Song of Songs is a book filled with imagery about the love between God and believers and should be read in light of this awesome revelation.

And so we see why Satan is so intent in defacing and destroying human sexuality and marriage. He is trying to mock God. He is trying to

mar the very image of God expressed on this earth through the marital bond, sexual and otherwise. He is trying to rob God of His deepest and most passionate intention - that of marital union with man - because if he can destroy the beauty of the earthly bond, he can destroy in us any desire for the heavenly bond.

You and I, and every believer, were created to live in marital union with God, both now and in the age to come. Everything about a healthy marital union on this earthly plane has been designed by God to be a reflection of the interaction that we are meant to have with God Himself:

- the covenant that is struck to bind us together eternally;

- the signs and symbols of that covenant that are a public declaration of that bond;

- the keeping pure of oneself for the other;

- the wedding party, with a host of invited guests looking on, rejoicing in the display of our mutual love and affection;

- intimate moments of sharing our deepest self with the other, resulting in new life being born and a oneness of body, soul and spirit;

- over time, the development of a oneness of heart that produces a unity of thinking, and even, appearance (cf Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2 - “when He appears, we shall be like Him”).

- The parallels are endless.

The Meaning for Believers

God desires that we develop and nurture a personal, interactive relationship with Him.

When you marry someone, you don't go live in separate houses and never talk to each other from that day forward, do you? That's not the way it's supposed to happen!

It's the same with the Church. A lot of people think that they're just suppose to say the marriage vows, ("I accept Jesus as my Savior"), get born again and then go about their merry way. They've got their ticket to heaven, but have every intention of continuing to live their life the way they want to, (albeit cleaned up a bit more), without any serious effort at having intimacy with the one to whom they've just given their life.

Perhaps that's the problem. Perhaps most Christians don't realize that getting born again is just the starting point of a rich and deeply intimate life in union with God. And so they miss out on the very heart of what they've been given. They remain focused on themselves and the things of this world and lose the very purpose of their life!

God has set His affection and love on us for all eternity. He wants us to gleefully pursue Him with the ardor and fervor of a new bride, embrace Him, and share intimate moments of deep unity with Him.

I'll never forget the day – it was the first time that the Lord had told me to give my full testimony in public. It was excruciatingly difficult because I was convinced that if people knew what I had been in my past, they would reject me. But I did it because I knew God was asking me to. And at the end, as I awaited the final verdict of the crowd, (which turned out to be very positive and supportive), I felt God inside of me jumping up and down and clapping His hands as a child would, going, "Yeah! You did it! You did it!" I felt the pleasure of God responding to my sacrificial act of love for Him - and I will never forget that moment as long as I live. We had an altar call and they flooded to the front to be cleansed from their sin. *New life was born!*

To put it another way, the mystery of Christ and the Church is the mystery of God bearing new life through intimate communion with man. You have the husband, Christ, becoming one with His wife in an act of covenant-making, and we become born again. The marriage is then consummated and in the act of sowing spiritual seeds within us, new life is born around us. People see our passion for God and turn to Him. They hear the word of our testimony and learn how to overcome the enemy.

They experience the life of God in us being expressed through unconditional love and sacrificial action, which kindles a flame for God within them.

There's personal growth happening, as well. We are transformed into His image, with ever increasing glory. In fact, there's so much spiritual fruit being born from our intimacy with God that half the time we don't even know it's happening.

It is so very important that we not stop with the initial moment of salvation, but that we go on to the exchange of selfless love and service, to the giving of ourselves to God. We, the Bride, must bear and nurture that new life into fullness. If we don't nurture it by taking a daily swim in the Scriptures, by singing love songs to the Lover of our souls; if we don't pursue Him with all our heart, mind and soul, the great harvest of spiritual fruit that God wants to produce with us will never come to life. There's mutual responsibility involved in our marriage with God just as there is within any marriage.

Consider this: the image of both husband and wife is passed on to the life that they create together. When a man and a woman come together and a baby is formed, the image of that man and woman is in that baby. It looks like one of them and acts like the other!

The same thing happens spiritually. When Christ plants His spiritual seeds in us and we give birth to new life, the spiritual children that we have are going to look like us. This is why it is so important for us to remain faithful in our walk with the Lord and to be conformed to His image through our own intimate relationship with Him.

The people that are born to new life from our love relationship with Christ are in many ways going to look like us. Why? Because we are the enfleshed model that they will see, day in and day out. They may never attain to a greater image of God than the one you and I reflect to them. Thus, the image of both husband and wife gets passed on to the new life.

We have been designed to reflect the image of another. If God isn't the love of our life, we will reflect what is.

Some ten years ago now, I had a vision while in worship. Suddenly, in the midst of my singing, I found myself in heaven in the presence of God. An instant later, I realized that I was in the middle of a wedding ceremony

and that I was the one getting married - to God! A jolt of joy and wonder shot through my heart.

Several years later, I asked Leanne Payne what she thought the vision had meant. She told me that it was important for everyone to marry God, even those who marry someone here on earth. In fact, she said, they should enter into a marital union with God first, so that their earthly marriage doesn't become an attempt to get something from a person that they can only get from God. Only then will they be adequately prepared to be the spouse of another.

Christopher West has written a wonderful book called *The Good News About Sex & Marriage*. In it, he describes how earthly marital unions were established by God to be a type and shadow of the greater marriage between God and man.

He writes:

From beginning to end, the Bible itself is a story about marriage. It begins in the Book of Genesis with the marriage of Adam and Eve, and it ends in the Book of Revelation with the "wedding of the Lamb" - the marriage of Christ and the Church. Throughout the Old Testament, God's love for His people is described as the love of a husband for his bride. In the New Testament, Christ embodies this love. He comes as the heavenly Bridegroom to unite Himself forever to His Bride - to us. Yes, God's plan from all eternity is to "marry" us - to draw us into closest communion with Himself. God wanted to reveal this eternal plan to us in a way we couldn't miss, so He stamped it right into our very being as male and female. This means that everything God wants to tell us on earth about who He is, who we are, the meaning of life, the reason He created us, how we are to live, and even our ultimate destiny is contained somehow in the truth and meaning of sexuality and marriage. . . . .

. . . [The Scriptures say that] a man will leave father and mother and cling to his bride, and the two shall become one flesh. . . . [Likewise] Christ left His Father in heaven. He left the home of His mother on earth - to give up His body for His Bride, so that we might become "one flesh" with Him. . . .

. . . God created Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into him. . . . remember that the Spirit of God is the very love between the Father and the Son. God is breathing His love into the man. . .

. . . the man is a person called to live in a relationship of love with God. The man, having received the love of God, is called to give himself back to God. He's also called to share the love of God with others. It's stamped into his very being, and he can only fulfill himself by doing so. As one church counsel put it, 'Man, who is the only creature on earth that God created for His own sake, cannot fully find himself except through the sincere gift of himself.' This is why the Lord said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him' (Genesis 2:18). That is, God said, 'I will make someone he can love.'. . .

. . . Adam looked at himself; he looked at Eve. He realized this profound reality: 'We go together. God made us for each other. I can give myself to you, and you can give yourself to me, and we can live in a life-giving communion of love' - the image of God, marriage. . . .

. . . Satan sets out to keep us from God's life by convincing us that God doesn't love us. . . .

. . . In offering us His body, Christ offers us a 'marriage proposal.' All we need do is say yes by offering our bodies - our whole selves - back to Him.

(Christopher West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage*, 2000, 18-28)

. . . Marriage in this life is meant to point us to heaven, where, for all eternity, we will celebrate the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev 19:7), the marriage of Christ and the Church. This is the deepest desire of the human heart - to live in the eternal bliss of marital intimacy with God Himself. As wonderful as marriage can be in this life, it's only a sign, a foretaste, a sacrament of this joy to come. Earthly marriage is simply preparation for heavenly marriage. . . .

. . . In heaven, all that separates and divides us on earth will be done away with. We'll all live in a heavenly communion of persons as the one Bride of Christ.

(Christopher West, *Good News About Sex & Marriage: Answers to Your Honest Questions About Catholic Teaching*, 2000, 62-63)

But first, we must marry God - not just legally and judicially, but in truth. This is the sacred mystery of the ages! As Leanne Payne says - all of us should marry God, for it is from that foundational relationship that the power and inspiration for all other relationships is to flow.

Let's not waste or in any way disregard this precious inheritance.

Let me close with a story that I heard from Bishop Chuck Jones of Selma, Alabama. . . . .

One day a beggar saw a magi and his entourage approaching from a distance. He was quite poor, owning only the bowl of rice in his hands. As the magi drew near, the beggar cried out "Oh magi, if you would please share with me out of the bounty that God has placed into your hands, I might live another day." The magi stepped down from his carriage and said to the beggar, 'I am so very hungry today. Would you give me your bowl of rice?' The beggar was astonished and a bit peeved that such a rich man would be asking him for anything when he was the one in need. So he ran his fingers through the rice in his bowl and finally brought two grains to give to the magi. The magi thanked him, mounted his carriage and rode off down the road. By then, the beggar was fuming and ran his fingers through the rice once again, suddenly noticing a piece of gold the size and shape of a grain of rice. He frantically scrounged around some more and found a second grain of gold, but no more. Looking up as the magi began to fade from sight in the distance, he cried, "Magi - if I had only known, I would have given you the entire bowl!"

Let's give our Lord the entire bowl!

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Dr. David Kyle Foster is the author of Transformed Into His Image and Love Hunger, and is the founder/director of Mastering Life Ministries. Read more of his take on sexual sin and brokenness in his newest book, The Sexual Healing Reference Edition and listen to his twice-weekly podcast at: charismapodcastnetwork.com/show/purepassion.